

The Date of Buddha **Based on Tamil Literary Tradition**

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Introduction: It is well known that the date of Buddha has been fixed as c.567 – 487 BCE. However, the British / European scholars have never conclusively decided it. In fact, they were more particular about fixing the date of Nirvana of Buddha and every scholar has recorded that the date arrived by him is not final. Wilhelm Geiger in his introduction to *Mahavamsa* records clearly about his attempt to fix the date of Nirvana that his calculation had been only approximate, as it could not be decided conclusively¹. Vincent Arthur Smith mentioned only that Buddha preached for forty-five years and died aged eighty at Kusinagara and that the date of his decease like that of Mahavira, cannot be determined with accuracy².

In fact, he went on to record that –

*"It must be clearly understood that Brahmanical Hinduism continued to exist and to claim innumerable adherents throughout the ages. It may well be doubted if Buddhism can correctly be described as having been the prevailing religion in India as a whole at any time. The phrase "Buddhist period" to be found in many books, is false and misleading. Neither a Buddhist nor a Jain period ever existed. From time to time either Buddhism or Jainism obtained exceptional success and an unusually large percentage of adherents in the population of one kingdom or another, but neither heresy ever superseded Brahmanical Hinduism"*³.

E. J. Rapson also records -

"Unfortunately, even after all that has been written on the subject of early Buddhist chronology, we are still uncertain as to the exact date of Buddha's birth. The date 483 B.C., which is adopted in this history must still be regarded as provisional".

But, the presence of Buddha, his teachings, the Buddhist art and architecture and their impact and predominance on India and the ancient world cannot be ignored. In fact, the religious and philosophic influence on Christianity has been so tremendous that a group of scholars point out a possible development of Christianity from Buddhism⁴. In any case doubting the religious dominance of Buddhism, particularly in India is intriguing.

A. L. Basham has pointed out that the so called Asokan pillars were in existence even before Asoka and compared the animal motifs with that of Indus seals⁵. How Asokan pillars could have been in existence before Asoka?

Analyzing the evidences, K. D. Sethna has fixed date 950 BCE for Asoka⁶. A similar situation is found in the case of the date of Buddha, as Buddhism was there even before Buddha! For such an exigency proof is available in the Tamil literature, particularly, *Manimekhalai*.

Based on the archaeological evidences, recently another scholar⁷ has also raised some valid points and questions. Giving the examples of the Brazen Palace (161-137 BCE)

situated north of Sacred Bo-tree, Buddhist railings at Jetvana Dagoba (276-309 BCE), Abahayagiri Dagoba and Lakrama Dagoba built by Vattagamani Abahaya (89-77 BCE), Thuparama Stupa built by Devanampiyatissa (250-210 BCE), Ruwanveliseya and Mirisayati Dagoba built by Dattagamani (161-137 BCE), he proves that the stone architecture i.e, Buddhist architecture had been developed in the 3rd century BCE itself in Sri Lanka. As the same type of technology and methodology of architecture existed throughout India during the material period, he raised the following questions -

1. Sri Lanka is situated nearly 2400 kms away from Pataliputra or Sanchi. How then the architects / sculptors could have built the same types of structures at these places?
2. Does it mean the same type of technology and methodology of architecture was prevalent in the length and breadth of the country?
3. What was that technology and methodology? What was the basis of it?
4. When Chandragupta Maurya (322-298 BCE) was building his palaces with wood, his grandson Asoka (298-273 BCE) was building so many stupas, Caltys and monasteries with stone! How it was possible?

Therefore, definitely, the date of Buddha has been crucial in Indian history in chronological aspect. As Manimekhalai deals with these questions, particularly, it gives the year of birth of Buddha as 1616, to what extent it is consistent with tradition, historical evidences etc., are considered in this paper.

What Silalai Sattanar Says About Buddha? Buddha is mentioned with different names significantly bringing out the historical facts connected with him.

| Name | Reference | Explanation |
|----------------------|---------------------|--|
| Vaman | 5.75, 30.13 | Beautiful - Buddha, who conquered Maran / Mara. |
| Ariyan | 25.8 | Aryan denotes Buddha. Therefore, the racial connotation attached to this word is questionable. |
| Madhavan | 21.18 | The Great Man of Penance |
| Buddha Gnayiru | 12.86; 21.167 | Buddha, the Sun. |
| Perarivalan | 12.78 | A Very Great Intellect |
| Adisan Munivan | 7.19 | Virtuous Ascetic / Monk. |
| Adi Mudhalvan | 6.11; 12.108; 30.23 | The First First |
| Adi Jinendran | 29.47 | The First Conqueror of Senses |
| Periyon | 15.22 | The Great One |
| Bodhi Madhavan | 15.28; 21.178 | The Enlightened one under the Bodhi Tree. |
| Pulavon | 20.5 | Highly Knowledgeable |
| Nathan | 28.71, 89; | |
| Bodhi Mulattu Nathan | 30.24 | Embodiment of Knowledge, who got enlightened under the Bodhi Tree. |
| Murana Tiruvaramurty | 30.8 | Embodiment of Virtues without any contradictions |
| Sudhakan | 28.95 | Denotes Buddha |

Thus, Buddha is considered as the First of First among all virtues and qualities and elevated to Godhead. These adjective descriptions tally with Jataka and other Buddhist traditions.

The Time and Date of Birth of Buddha: Sittalai Sattanar (M.15.23-25) mentions about the birth of Abuttiran in Javakanadu (Java) with the astronomical position, which is very similar to that of the birth of Buddha as follows:

1. Ilavenir / Early Summer period.
2. Sun was in Rishaba rasi
3. Vaisaka month.
4. Of 27 stars, 13 crossed.
5. In the middle of such stars i.e, at Visaka, as Kartigai is taken as the first star.

This tallies with Buddhist texts, which give the date of birth: He was born on *Isanasaka* 68, Vaikasi month, Friday, a Pauranami day – Full Moon. But, again, here scholars say they do not know what is that *Isanasaka*

Interestingly, the Madhavar at Cakravalakotta were surprised to note the astronomical coincidence (M.1531-32) – How Abuttiran could have born on the same day on which Buddha was born? How they knew the birth of Abuttiran in Java from Cakravalakottam of Tamilagam? How they were observing the planetary and star positions and motions? In any case, it is evident that the date of Buddha born at Kapilavastu and Abuttiran born at Java is one and the same. The date of birth of Buddha born at Kapilavastu is determined as – Vaisakha Su.15, Vishakhka, a Friday in March. Full moon ends at 59 gh. 24v.gh. Vaisjhaka ends at 24 gh. Therefore, last Friday i.e, 31st March⁸.

Now, analyze the year of birth of Buddha as mentioned by Sittalai Sattanar in 12th verse / Kathai. 72-82 lines.

"The Devas who are all at Cakravalakottam fell at the feet of the Glorious Deva together prayed. They were told that like a Sun, who dispels all darkness that surrounds the world, "A Very Great Intellect" (Perarivalan) would appear in the year of 1616 [(2 x 8 x 100) + (2 x 8)] = 1600 + 16 = 1616".

Here, the expression *Perarivalan* is denoted to Buddha. However, what the year 1616 denotes is not mentioned and the era followed hinted. However, he would not have mentioned the year for fun – $(2 \times 8 \times 100) + (2 \times 8) = 1600 + 16 = 1616$ or mathematical riddle.

Scholars' Opinion on the Year of 1616 Mentioned in Manimekhalai: The opinion based on the study and research of earlier scholars is given as follows:

1. **U. V. Swaminatha Iyer:** In his commentary, he has noted that to which era, the date belongs to is not known⁹.
2. **N. M. Venkatasamy Nattar and S. Duraisamy Pillai:** The authors, have though written commentary, about the year 1616, they say – The year mentioned here belongs to which Era is not known¹⁰. This is the opinion given most of the Tamil scholars.
3. **D. S. Trivedi:** The famous (khyalah) Varahamihira, the Court poet of Vikramaditya of Ujjain was born in B.C. 123 on his own statement, for he says that when 427 years of Saka king had passed, he was on the earth. By subtracting 427 from 550, the epoch

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of the Saka Era, we get B.C.123. If we add 123 to 1616, we come to the date 1793 B.C, which is so near to B.C. 1790, our calculated date of the Lord. The astronomical datum contained in the *Manimekhalai* regarding the asterism may also refer to the fourteenth asterism from Ashlesha which began with the advent of the Kali B.C.3101. But, it is for the Tamil scholars to judge how far my interpretation is nearer to the idea implied in the text. So the fourteenth asterism would be Dhanistha which lasted from B.C. 1876 to B.C. 1776. And if the Lord's birth is placed in B.C. 1870 (1790 + 80), it would fall in the fourteenth asterism as asserted by *Manimekhalai*¹¹.

Though, he has requested the Tamil scholars to judge his interpretation, it appears, no Tamil scholar has responded to it. Though some Tamil scholars¹² had earlier attempted to find out the date of Nirvana, they had arrived at the date 494 BCE or about, as they had taken the same sources of the earlier scholars. Surprisingly, they have not even mentioned about the date mentioned in *Manimekhalai*.

Therefore, what this 1616 year denotes? The possibilities are –

1. If it is taken as the year after the birth of Kali, it is equal to $3102 - 1616 = 1486$ BCE.
2. If Saka era is taken, then, it becomes equal to $1616 + 78 = 1694$ BCE.
3. If it is already in Saka year, it is taken as such i.e, 1616 BCE.

Here, it can be noted that these dates are nearly 1200 years before the modern dates fixed by the western scholars.

Another Kovalan During the Period of Buddha: Masattuvar, the father of Kovalan got converted to Buddhism. He conferred that as his son was no more, he decided to convert. However, certain information told by him is interesting in the context. He says that there was another Kovalan, who lived eight generations before the present Kovalan, who built a Caitya in Vanjinagar (M.28:123-136). He was also a friend of Kudakkoc Ceraladhan. Therefore, the possibilities are –

1. If the date of the present Kovalan is taken as first century CE, then, the Kovalan of ninth generation before him must have lived at least 450-500 years before him i.e, 500-450 BCE (taking 50 years for each generation 90×50).
2. As the modern date of Buddha is c.567 – 487 BCE, he could not have built a Caitya immediately during the period of Buddha.
3. In fact, the Buddhist missionaries of Asoka would have gone to Ceylon only during 3rd century BCE.
4. Either, Kovalan contemporary of Kudakko Ceraladhan must have lived after the spread of Buddhism in the ancient Tamilagam or Buddha must have existed before his period so that the Buddhism to become so popular among the Tamils and Kovalan to build a Caitya for Buddha.

Therefore, it is evident that Kovalan of earlier period could have built a Caitya only after the spread of Buddhism in Tamilagam implying that Buddhism was prevalent during that period in Tamilagam, which is not supported by Sangam literature.

Sittalai Sattanar's Knowledge of World Geography: Unlike other Tamil poets, Sittalai Sattanar gives a fairly accurate picture about the world, the countries and islands in it, the oceans surrounding them etc. A globe made of clay /earth and depicted at Cakravalakottam contains the following (M.6.190-202):

1. The Mount Meru at the centre of the earth.
2. Seven mountains surrounding it.
3. Four big traditional continents surrounded by oceanic waters.
4. About 2000 small islands surrounding them.
5. These places are located and explained to the onlookers.
6. The existence of life in these areas, their abodes etc., have been depicted with figures made of clay / earth.
7. It was designed and executed by the Divine Carpenter / Architect Mayan.

The various countries, cities and other places mentioned are given in TABLE – A appended. It is only illustrative and not exhaustive. But, it clearly proves that the poet knows the places mentioned with clear geographical knowledge of the ancient India and world. It also tallies with the ancient geography and cosmology as has been depicted in Itihasas and Puranas.

Uttara Magadha, Magadha and Famine: Sittalai Sattanar specifically mentions Uttara Magadha and Magadha separately. Their significance is analyzed here.

1. Uttara Magadha: Kanthirpavai says that Manimekhalai would be born in Uttara Magadha and she would take only male births to fulfill the virtuous acts and become the first Savagan (Srivagan -> Savagan = a person who listens) / disciple of Buddha (21.175-179). Here, it has to be mentioned that she would move away from Kancipuram, as it would be affected by famine for 12 years.

2. Magadha: Buddha would be born as a proud Tilak (on the forehead) of Magadha and harbinger of Kapilaimpathi / Kapilavastu (26.42-46). He says that Magadha would get rains without forgetting (by Indra). Magadha would get rains, hinting thereby there would not be any droughts or famine, as happened in the past. The Jaina texts clearly mention that because of the famine at Magadha for 12 years, Chandragupta Maurya entrusted the kingdom to one of his sons, Simhasena and proceeded to Sravana-Belgola in Mysore along with Baddrabahu to die fasting according to Jaina tenets¹³.

Again, in another place, it is mentioned that the metal technicians of Magadha came to Tamilagam to build a Mantap along with minute metal workers of Maratta, Blacksmiths of Avanti, carpenters of Yavanam and of course that of experts of Tamilagam (19.107-111). This also proves the unity and integrity of building technology of Bharat. Mahavastu, a Pali text mentions that the brass utensils of Magadha were popular all over Bharat¹⁴. Therefore, it is significant the the poet has recorded such minute details about the metal technicians of ancient Bharat.

3. Magadha Famous for pre-Asokan Buddhism: Incidentally, Magadha was famous for pre-Asokan Buddhist activities. Pre-Asokan Buddhism was mostly confined to Kosala and Magadha and lesser to Mathura and Ujjaini¹⁵. Therefore, the poet need not make Manimekhalai to go to Magadha to continue her labour. It can also be interpreted that he

was narrating events of pre-Asokan period (273-232 BCE), that is why, perhaps, Asoka is not mentioned in his work.

Thus, it is evident that Sittalai Sattanar was recording such historical events in his works. Therefore, his data about the date of birth of Buddha has to be taken into account carefully to find out the truth.

Cakravalakottam and the Astronomical Knowledge of Sittalai Sattanar: Cakravalā = horizon + kottam = a place, thus the place for horizon implying observing horizon. The description of Cakravalakottam and Manipallavam does not give full picture, the available depiction clearly points to the following concept of Meru.

1. The Buddhapada was on a cubical pedestal of 1 muzham / 3.75 ft height, which was in turn situated on a padmam, a five-petal lotus shaped platform and a circular structure underneath. The entire structure had openings pointing the four cardinal points with 9 muzham / 11.25 ft width (M.8:45-49).
2. In three dimensions, the figure resembles half of the structure of Mount Meru. Cakravalakottam is depicted containing 4 invisible Brahmas, 16 visible Brahmas, 2 Lights Sun & Moon, 6 Devaganas, 8 Narakas and others (M.6:176-185). Four types of devas are mentioned: 1. Vasus – 8; 2. Adityas – 12; 3. Rudras – 11 and 4. Marutts – 2 (thus total = 33).
3. In Cakra form, it resembles Sri Cakra, the two dimensional representation of Meru.
4. Mention has already been made above about the globular structure at Cakravalakottam.
5. It contains wide view of horizon with asterisms, days, planets assigning respective gods to them. Therefore, it is nothing but an observatory with observers recording the movement of asterisms, planets etc.
6. Mention has also been made about his recording of time of birth with planetary position.

When Buddha was Known, Why Asoka Not Known in Manimekhalai? Sittalai Sattanar has vividly described Buddha in his work, but no whisper made about Asoka (c.273-232 BCE). As Asoka is considered as the ardent and zealous missionary who spread Buddhism throughout India and even outside, absence of his name in the Sangam literature – *Ettuttogai* and *Patippattu* is also intriguing, though *Moriyar* have been mentioned.

Therefore, a question arises as to whether Buddhism was not dominant during that period 500 BCE to 500 CE or 300 BCE to 300 CE or its influence was contained. About the pre-Asokan Buddhism in Tamilagam, scholars have already debated¹⁵. Had Asoka's son Mahendra and daughter Sangamitra gone through Tamilagam with their missionaries, Sittalai Sattanar or any other Sangam poet would not have missed such an event. But, as such events have been conspicuously missing, the following questions arise in the context:

1. Why the impact of Buddhism was not felt during the Sangam period?

2. If so, whether Buddhism could have entered earlier and been contained to such an extent, it was perhaps eliminated completely?
3. How Buddhism could have spread into Tamilagam before Asoka?
4. Why more Jaina influence was felt in Tamilagam than Buddhism?
5. Why some scholars have tried to show that Tolkappiyar was a Jain than a Buddhist?
6. Had Asoka's son Mahendra and daughter Sangamitra not gone through Tamilagam with their missionaries?

Had Asoka's son Mahendra and daughter Sangamitra gone through Tamilagam with their missionaries or Not? This is the crucial question to be analyzed critically. It has to be noted that the versions about the sojourn of Mahindra and Sangamitra have been based on traditions. According to one such tradition, Asoka was associated with the viceroalties of Talshasila and Ujjaini. Nilakanta Sastri argues based on inscriptional evidences that these were held by the princes of the royal family¹⁷. He adds that the beginning young Asoka's vicereignty of Ujjaini was marked by romance. When he halted at Vidisa on his way to the provincial capital, he fell in love with Devi, the beautiful daughter of a merchant, and made her his wife. The two children born out of this marriage, a son and a daughter, were Mahindra and Sangamitra, who having renounced the world attained celebrity as the authors of conversion of Ceylon to Buddhism (Mahavamsa, XIII.8-11; Dipavamsa, VI.15-17). However, scholars have had doubts about these incidences, as each version differs from the other.

Vincent Smith accepts Hiuen Tsang's statement that Mahendra was a brother, not son, of Asoka, and follows Oldenberg in doubting the real existence of Sangamitra. After discussing the untrustworthiness of the Ceylonese chronicles, he records,

"We must be content to admit our ignorance, which is likely to continue. I am sceptical about the tale of Sanhamitra, the supposed daughter of Asoka. Her name means 'Friend of the Order' is extremely suspicious, and the inscriptions give no indication of her existence. Professor Oldenberg has justification for his opinion that the story of Mahinda and his sister seems to have been —

"Invented for the purpose of possessing a history of the Buddhist institutions in the island, and to content it with the most distinguished person conceivable — the great Asoka. The historical legend is fond of poetically exalting ordinary occurrences into great and brilliant actions; we may assume that, in reality things were accomplished in a more gradual and 'less striking manner than such legends make them appear'"¹⁸.

Vincent Smith concludes, ".....notwithstanding the mythology which has gathered around his name, Mendra or Mahinda, the young brother of Asoka, was a real, historical personage, and therefore can be no doubt that he was a pioneer in his diffusion of Buddhism in Ceylon"¹⁹.

Based on the 7th century Malakotta Pandyan records, Smith agrees for the suggestion that Mahendra might have gone to Ceylon by following a land route instead of flying to reach Ceylon as per the Ceylonese chronicles. However, the Ceylonese chronicles record that Maha Aritta, nephew of King Devanampiya Tissa / Tishya (250-210 BCE) with envoys reached the port of Tamaliptri (Tamluk in Bengal) in seven days and reached

the Imperial Court of Asoka in another seven days to meet Asoka in person²⁰. Therefore, it is evident that Mahendra must have reached Ceylon by ship, as Tamilagam was not receptive. That is why perhaps Sittalai Sattanar had known Buddha but not Asoka. Or he lived before Asoka (273-232 BCE)?

Vincent Smith also²¹ gives another important detail that Hieun Tsang like Asokavadana placed Asoka a century after Buddha, the date assigned by the Ceylonese legend to Kalasoka. The conversion of Ceylon, according to him took place one hundred years after the death of Buddha i.e, in 387 BCE (487 - 100). Therefore, that becomes the date of Asoka instead of 273-232 BCE!

Here, all have been discussing only about the spread of Buddhism in Ceylon and not in Tamilagam. As Buddhism had evidently developed as a State religion in Ceylon during 3rd century BCE, there is a possibility that Buddhism might have entered into Tamilagam through Ceylon, as it was already under its sway. It has to be mentioned that Buddhism had been active during many centuries before current era in the South East Asian countries. Therefore, Buddhism might have entered into Tamilagam from these countries through Buddhist merchants and missionaries, which has been succinctly and vividly described by Sittalai Sattanar in Manimekhalai.

Why Tamilagam Was Not Conducive to Buddhism? Hatigumba inscription of Kalinga King Kharavela (176-163 BCE) mentions that he destroyed a "Tramira / Dramira Desha Sangatana" - a Tamil confederation of Kings or League of Tamil States, which posed a great danger to him in his 11th year of reign i.e. in 165 BCE. This shows that the strong Tamil federation was in existence from 278 to 165 BCE (165 + 113) i.e, for 113 years. Therefore, politically, Sangam period Tamil Kings had been strong enough to resist the influence of Mauryas and Kalingas. It is a common feature that Tamilagam practiced animal sacrifice extensively in the worship of Kandu / Murugan / Velan. Therefore, they were not receptive to Buddhism that taught total non-violence, non-killing of animals etc.

What Are the Dates Given by the European scholars? The European scholars have given the following dates to Buddha Nirvana²². However, it noted as to why they had been so obsessed with the date of Nirvana than others are intriguing. Buddhist archaeological evidences are enormous and spread throughout the ancient world - China, Middle East, Central Asia, Europe and South East Asian countries, and there are even now available. Surprisingly, most of them are datable to 4th-3rd centuries BCE.

| Sl. No | Author / Authority / Reference | Given dates all in BCE | Birth date |
|--------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Kern | 368; 380; 388 | 448; 460; 468 |
| 2 | Rhys Davids | 412 | 502 |
| 3 | Max Mueller | 477 | 527 |
| 4 | Oldenberg | 480 | 560 |
| 5 | J. F. Fleet | 482 | 562 |
| 6 | Fachu | 483 | 563 |
| 7 | Canton tradition | 485 | 565 |
| 8 | R. M. Smith | 486 | 566 |
| 9 | V. A. Smith, Early History of India | 487 | 567 |
| 10 | V. A. Smith, Asoka | 508 | 588 |
| 11 | Mahavamsa | 520 | 600 |

| | | | |
|----|---|------------------------|------------------------|
| 12 | Siam tradition | 529 | 609 |
| 13 | Dipavamsa and Ceylon tradition | 543 | 613 |
| 14 | Inscriptional record at Gaya | 633 | 713 |
| 15 | Pegu and Chinese tradition | 638 | 718 |
| 16 | Tibetan tradition | 653 | 733 |
| 17 | Ma Mueller | 683 | 763 |
| 18 | Padmakarpo | 835 | 915 |
| 19 | Tibetan dates | 837; 880; 882; | 917; 960; 962; |
| 20 | Mongol chronology | 901 | 981 |
| 21 | Georgi | 959, 960 | 1039; 1040 |
| 22 | Sir William Jones | 1004 | 1084 |
| 23 | Sir William Jones, His works, Vol.IV, pp.17, 42-46. | 1027 | 1107 |
| 24 | Tibetan date | 1031 | 1111 |
| 25 | Max Mueller, History of Sanskrit Literature, pp.141-143. | 1221 | 1301 |
| 26 | Fleet ²³ , according to Rajatarangini Asoka lived about 1260 BCE | 1631 | 1711 |
| 27 | Sir James Prinsep | 1332 | 1412 |
| 28 | Abdul Fazl, Ain-I-Akbari | 1367 | 1447 |
| 29 | Sitalai Sattanar, Manimekalai | 1616 | 1696 |
| 30 | D. S. Trivedi | 1790; 1793 | 1870; 1873 |
| 31 | Thiruvankatacharya | 1807 | 1887 |
| 32 | Tibetan and Chinese traditional dates | 2135; 2139; 2148; 2422 | 2215; 2219; 2128; 2502 |

From the above, it is clear that the scholars can be divided into three categories –

1. One group assigning period around 6th-5th centuries BCE.
2. Second group assigning to 18th – 17th centuries BCE.
3. Third group to 26th-25th centuries BCE.

Why the dates should range so widely? It is evident that all scholars have decided their dates only based on speculations, though, they dealt with literary, epigraphical, numismatic, scriptural, astronomical and other evidences.

Buddhism Before Buddha (c.567-497 BCE): The topic appears to anachronistic and idiosyncratic, but there have certain records and evidences to show such an exigency prevailed.

1. According to a book called "*Fu-Tsu-Li-Tai-Tung-Tsai*" (a general record of Buddha and Patriarches in all ages) a history of Buddhism during the years of Ling Mu of Chou dynasty (1001-945 BCE), a Deva came from India to China. This Deva, it was believed, would turn hills into rivers, rivers into hills, transform cities and towns, enters water and fire; in short, he was credited with every kind of super-natural powers. The king received him as his saint and built a palace to accommodate him²⁴.
2. The date of setting up an image of 'Mitra Bodhisatva' is mentioned by Fa-Hien as follows: "The image was put about three hundred years after the Nirvana of Buddha,

which occurred during the reign of King P'ing of the Chow Dynasty (770-719 B.C.)²⁵. ***As king P'ing's reign lasted from 750-719 B.C. this would place the death of Buddha in the Eleventh century B.C.***

3. A. V. Thyagaraja Aiyar states that a tomb in Athens discovered during 1956 contains an inscription which reads, "Here lies Indian Sramanacharya from Bodha Gaya a Sakya monk taken to Greece by his Greek pupils and tomb marks his death at about 1000 B.C." ²⁶.
4. G. Bongard-Levin and A. Vigasin opine that one may suppose that the first followers of the Buddha arrived in Central Asia as far as back as the Achaemenid era (558-320 BCE), however, there is no direct information about this. Then discussing the literary and archaeological evidences, they come to conclusion that thus, there are quite sufficient grounds for dating the penetration of Buddhism into the southern regions of Central Asia as the 2nd-1st centuries B.C. ²⁷.
5. Another Chinese book "*Fu-tsu-Tang-Chi*" stated that in the fourth year of King Cheng of Chin States (268 BCE), 18 monks headed by one Shri Bandhu came to China from India ²⁸.
6. Seafaring Buddhists were not uncommon. Kern refers in his *Buddhismus* (Vol.II, p.279) to Yas'as, the third patriarch in the Northern succession, and tells that during Buddha's lifetime he had been a merchant-sailor (" Seehandler") ²⁹.
7. Nor were all Buddhist missionaries natives of India. Among those sent out after the Tird Council under Tishya-Maudgaliputra was Dharmarakshita, "the Greek", who laboured with success among the natives of Western Asia ²⁹.
8. Scythian and Parthian missionaries were likewise active ²⁹.
9. Asoka (273-232 BCE) built some of his stupas in China and his missionary Shih Li-fang acquainted the Chinese with Buddhist texts during the reign of Emperor Hu (221-208 BCE) ³⁰.
10. Buddhist missionaries visited the court of T'sin Emperor in 217 BCE ³⁰.
11. During the reign of Wu (140-87 BCE), the influence Buddhist teaching was found ³⁰.
12. According to Pan-ku, who lived in the end of 1st century, in his work *Itsean-Han-Shu*, trade relations between Kanchipuram and China go back to Wu period (140-86 BCE). Kanchipuram is mentioned as Yuwantse ³³.
13. The same book also records what the Indian sage Kasyapa Matunga told Emperor Ming-ti (58-75 CE) of the Han dynasty, "In the past the King Asoka built 84,000 pagodas for storing the relics of Buddha, 19 of which were within the country of China" ³⁴.

It appears that Chinese literary traditions have strong case for Buddhism existing there well before the present date assigned to Buddha. The Central Asian archaeological findings also prove the spread of Buddhism there during the 3rd century BCE. The contemporary spread of Buddhism also raises a question as to how it could have been

possible, when it was not even conceived or had been in formative stages. The pre-Asokan Buddhism prevalent in Magadha and Vaisali as pointed out above and other places outside as shown now, clearly point a fact that Buddhism had spread even before Asokan converted to Buddhism or started his missionary activities.

Conclusion: Based on the above discussion and data, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Sittalai Sattanar has been the first Tamil poet to record the day – Friday, New Moon and -year of birth of Buddha as - 1616, though to which era it belonged is not hinted.
2. Probably, he has been the first Tamil poet to give the ancient cosmological and geographical picture of world and India tallying with the details of Itihasas and Puranas.
3. He has been the first Tamil poet to mention and describe an observatory in Tamilagam, which was used to observe the movement of asterisms, planets etc., and the dates of events of personalities.
4. His description suggests that he might be describing Tamilagam, when there was no Mauryan influence felt.
5. His description suggests that Buddhism might have come into Tamilagam from Ceylon than the northern India introduced by Asokan missionaries supported by the mythological nature of Mahenran-Sangamitra story.
6. His recording of certain historical details of ancient India is significant.
7. The pre- Asokan pillars prove the archaeological contradictions in fixing the dates.
8. The wide range of dates given and discussed by the western scholars shows that all archaeological evidences and literary evidences are not taken into account.
9. The prevalent of Buddhism before Buddha, that too during his own times far and wide in different parts of the world with literary and archaeological evidence, as pointed out, makes one to think about the validity of the current date of Buddha.
10. Scholars of all fields should consider the data and information given in the ancient Tamil literature to find out the veracity of them for getting better results.

TABLE - A

| Name | Detail | Reference | Remarks, according to the text |
|-------------------|---|----------------------|--|
| Bharatam | Country | M.Padigam.22 ; 18.57 | The name of India has been specifically mentioned as Bharatam. |
| Mount Meru | A mountain | M.18.92 | Centre of the world cosmologically. |
| Saravana | A lake | M.18.92 | A sacred lake, where Murugan was born. |
| Vindhya | A mountain | 20.117, 120 | Durga resides in the mountain. |
| Malayam | A mountain | 1.3 | Equated with Pothigai |
| Kantharam | One of the Janapadas of Bharat in the northeast | M.9.13 | Present Afganistan, from where the mother of Duryodhana Kanthari hailed. |
| Kapilayampadhi | Kapilavastu | 26.44; 28.143 | The birth place of Buddha |
| Varanasi | Kasi | M.13.3, 78 | The sacred place situated on the Ganges |
| Kasi | As above | M.24.68 | |
| Ganges | A sacred river | M.Padigam.17 ; 26.12 | The sacred river where bath is taken to remove sins |
| Uttara Magadh | North Magadha | M.21.175 | Buddhism was here even before Asoka |
| Magadha | An important country / empire / city | 19.107; 26.42 | Where Manimekhalai would be born as the first disciple of Buddha |
| Kalinga | A country of Bharat | 26.46 | |
| Singapuram | A country of Bharat | 26.17 | As it is mentioned along with Kapilavastu and Kalinga, it must have been in the north. |
| Sanbai | A city | 7:102 | A city on the banks of Ganges |
| Tenthisai Kumari | A river | M.13.7, 83 | Sacred pilgrimage centre, where bath is taken |
| Kumaripadam | A place | M.13.74 | The feet of Goddess Kumari have to be worshipped as prescribed in the Vedas. |
| Naganannedu | Nagaland | M.9.21 | The place where Nagas lived |
| Korkai | A city | M.13.84 | |
| Kaveripumpattinam | Cola's Capital | M.28.135 | After the submergence, Colas moved to Vanji |
| Kaveri | A river | M.Padigam.12 ; 22.40 | A sacred river for bath to remove sins |
| Avanti | Also known as Ujjaini | M.9.28; 19.107 | An important astronomical city, where the Indian longitude passes. |
| Unjai | Refers to Ujjaini | M.15.64 | An important astronomical city, where the Indian longitude passes. |
| Asodharam | A country / city | M.9.38 | It might have been situated on the shores of Arabian sea, as its activities are compared with the sound of Aravikkadal or a sea producing noise / sound. |
| Cedi | Situated beyond Himalayas | M.17.21 | Situated in the northern Bharat. Land of Vidhyadharar. |
| Kanchanapuram | In Cedi | M.17.22 | A protected city in Cedi. |
| Kachi | A city | M.Padi.90; 21.154 | An important Buddhist centre |
| Kanchinadu | A city | M.28.158 | Equated with Kanchipuram |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Siddhipuram Langei | A city Ceylon / Sri Lanka | M.9.44 M.28.107, 113 | History Congress held at the University of Whether the Lanka of the period was part of India or otherwise has to be considered |
| Pandinannadu | The land of Pandyas | M.14.55 | There was famine, because rains failed for 12 years |
| Javagam | Java | M.14.74, 103; 15.3; 21.89 | One of the South East Asian Buddhist country |
| Gomukhi | In Manipallavam | M.14.91 | A sacred lake, where bath is taken. |
| Kosambi | A city | M.15.61 | |
| Manipallavam | An island | M.Padi.44, 74 etc | An important island of the poem, but its location is disputed. However, it can be located in one of the islands of South East Asian countries. |
| Navalantivu | Equated with Jambuttivu | M.2.1; 28.180; 9.17; 11.107, 15.20; 22.29 | The Island where Naval trees (Calyptranthus Caryophyllofolia) bearing fruits grow. |
| Tamilagam | Ancient Tamilnadu | M.17.62 | Comprising Cera, Cola and Pandya Kingdoms or South India |
| Jambuttivu | The ancient Bharat | M.1.35; 17.62 | It is equated with Navalntivu. Jambu = Naval fruit. |
| Marathar | Maharastra | M.19.107 | The people of Marata, Maharastra. |
| Yavanar | Greece or Rome | M.19.108 | The people of Yavana, Greece / Rome. |
| Tantamizhar | People of Tamilagam | M.19.109 | The people of Tamilagam. |
| Vanji | A city, capital | M.Padi.86; 19; 25.206, 212, 238; 21.91 | Capital of Cera country of Tamilagam. |
| Takkana Madurai | Southern Madurai | M.13.105; 22.106 | Madurai city situated in the southern direction. |
| Takkana Perur | Madurai | M.13.108 | |
| Tentamizh Madurai | Southern Tamil Madurai | M.25.139 | Madurai with Southern Tamil or city situated in the southern direction, where Tamil is spoken. |
| Antarattivu | The island situated inside | M.25.224 | Considered as one of the Four big Islands or continents mentioned earlier. |
| Aganperuntivu | Inner big island | M.25.224 | Considered as one of the Four big Islands or continents mentioned earlier |
| Kavaripumpattina m | A port city | | An important city-port submerged during first century BCE. |
| Cambathi vanam | A worshipping place | M.3.54 | Cambathi was brother of Jatayu. |
| Kavera vanam | A worshipping place | M.3.56 | Kaveran, father of Kaveri |

Notes and References

The text and commentaries of *Manimekhalai* of different commentators have been consulted and free translation is used here for interpretation.

As for as the spread of Buddhism, translation of Buddhist canonic works, there have been extensive literature available on the topic.

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E. J. Rapson, Cambridge History of India, Vol.1, p.171.
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16. T. N. Vasudeva Rao, **Buddhism in Tamil Country**, Annamalai University, Cidambaram, 1979, pp.1-2, 10.

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18. V. Oldenberg, **Introduction to the Vinayapitakam**, p.4 (ii), quoted by Vincent. A. Smith, **Asoka**, Low Price Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p.48.

19. S. Vincent Smith, Ibid, p.50.

20. Ibid, p.238.

21. Ibid, p.259.

22. These dates of Lord Buddha's Nirvana, as mentioned in the column.3 of the Table have been collected and mentioned as in the following books:

Sm.Vidyadevi, **The Annals of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute**, Poona, Vol.30, p.346.

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Thus, the dates of birth as shown in the column.4 is derived and mentioned for study.

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 23. Fleet as quoted by M. Krishnamacharya, History of Classical Sanskrit Literature,
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"We should find that the Rajatarangini would place Asoka somewhere about 1260 B.C. We should prefer to select the date B.C.1260. And then we should set about arranging the succession of the Kings of India itself from Puranas, with B.C. 1260 for the approximate date of the accession of Asoka as our starting point".

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